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INTERVIEWEE: WALTER HUNDLEY

INTERVIEWERS: WILLIAM LITTLE

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[00:00:00] **WILLIAM:** ...the timing, the various factions, competing for power. [laughs]

[00:00:07] **WALTER:** Don't everybody.

[00:00:09] **WILLIAM:** Well, what I'd like to do is just deal with this in a chronological standpoint. You can start discussing your initial involvement until you finished your involvement, was terminated. And I won't ask any specific—I will ask some specific questions, but I will primarily let you just talk about what you recall.

[00:00:34] **WALTER:** Okay, actually my first involvement with that kind of thing began when I was working at CAMP, the Central Area Motivation Program, and John Adams, you remember Rev. John Adams? Was here then and he was my board chairman, and John Cannon. You know John Cannon?

[00:01:01] **WILLIAM:** I don't think so.

[00:01:02] **WALTER:** He is a retired military guy, I first met him when we were active in CORE [Congress of Racial Equality] together in civil rights stuff. But he had gotten out of the service and retired here, and he became the head of the Yesler Atlantic Urban Renewal Project that Bea Hudson now heads. But he was the head then. And we got to thinking about the fact that here I had this OEO [Office of Economic Opportunity] federal program bringing money into the Central Area CAMP, and he was head of this urban renewal project in the Central Area, bringing money into there for housing, and we said, "How can we get the Blacks to get a better handle on it?"

So we called a meeting of all those Black contractors that we could identify then, up there at our CAMP headquarters at 17th and Union, it was then, that's when it burned down, they burned it down. And we tried to get them to form an association so that we could funnel some of this federal money to them. And they wouldn't go along with it. Each one was jealous of the other, and they couldn't find any basis to cooperate in that, so they didn't do anything. But one interesting thing happened, as a result of that. Johnny Allen, who had been in the painting business in the city for years and years and was making a good living at it, and was well-respected all across the city. He had jobs everywhere. He decided to branch out from just painting, and go into general contracting, and he's still in it, and he's doing pretty good.

Then when Model Cities came around, I got the job as Director, and the first year was supposed to be just a planning year, you know, you didn't get any money to start any of these projects and activities, it was just planning. So I got my staff at Model Cities together, and said, well, let's try again to organize the Black construction guys. And we did. We again called meetings. This time, we had a larger turnout and more interest, because the papers were full of Model Cities in those days, and all the good things it was going to do. In fact, they overdid it, they oversold the program. And we started meeting in the First A.M.E. [African Methodist Episcopal] Church basement and they organized and elected their first president, and all that.

After they got organized under Al Bush, one of the first things they did was get mad at us, at Model Cities, and essentially, push us to the side. And that was ok, as long as they were organized to do business. We had made a commitment that if they got organized, and organized soundly, that any Model Cities money used for construction in the area would go through them—that is, they would get the jobs. But they would have to have a sound organization, and a structure that we could rely on.

That went ok for a while, and then they started fighting among one another, and kicking out Tyree Scott. Even though they had kind of put us to the side, and said, in effect, "You guys aren't our sponsor anymore," they still kind of leaned on Model Cities whenever they got in trouble, or needed some advice or assistance of any kind. And we gave it. But it was always a case of one day you're our friend, the next day you're our enemy kind of thing. Well, that's just a quick, brief overview, but organizationally that's essentially the kind of involvement that we had then.

In terms of the projects we did, oh geez, I would have to just guess, but several million dollars went to the members of that organization for various projects that we undertook in the area. Unfortunately, a lot of those projects went right down the tube because the one thing we tried to get the group to do they wouldn't do, and that is, build into the organization and use the organization for upgrading themselves. We offered assistance in bringing experienced people, experts who would work along with them, who would help them do bidding, so

they'd bid a job right and not underbid it and find themselves in a hole and walk off from it and lose their bonds and all that. We tried to offer them bookkeeping assistance, keeping their books for them even, we did that—it makes me so mad when I think of it, we would keep these cat's books for them and then the oddballs wouldn't pay their bills, including their income tax, and when the government went after them, they'd say, "Well, Model Cities kept the books". And so, you know, the government would make us pay, in many instances. So we even got to the point after a while, where in order to keep them afloat, we'd require that they couldn't write a check on any of the project money for construction jobs, unless we countersigned the thing. And in some cases, those rascals would forge our deal, or take the guy we had assigned to it and hit him in the teeth, literally hit him in the teeth, and make him sign. So we had all kinds of problems trying to make professional contractors out of these cats.

[00:08:54] **WILLIAM:** Ok. Let me back up a little bit and go back to the time when CCC [sic, CCA] was fairly responsible, that's probably when Tyree was still there, Tyree had some kind of sense of responsibility, sense of right. Once Tyree was forced out, through violent means or whatever you want to say, then these problems occurred at that point in time, but these problems didn't exist while Tyree was there?

[00:09:19] **WALTER:** That's right.

[00:09:20] **WILLIAM:** Alright, I wanted to clarify that.

[00:09:23] **WALTER:** Cause Tyree insisted that the guys do business as business, and unfortunately a lot of those guys—not all of them, but a lot of them—were really construction con men. They had been in the business, some of them for years in the city, and they were literally taking people to the cleaners all the time. They figured they would take us to the cleaners, too. And if we would get them a job, it might be a \$100,000 job, and we really would secure the [?bread?] for them and do the bidding, help them develop , all that junk. They get their first drawdown, and instead of even buying the materials necessary to do the job, the next thing you know they got a car, or they're going to Las Vegas, spending a lot of money, and they wouldn't even be able to meet payrolls. We've had the workers of some of these guys come to our office and say, "Where's my pay?" Because the guy they're working for, the contractor, wasn't paying them. But you're right, Tyree, that's why they forced him out.

[00:11:06] **WILLIAM:** Because he wouldn't let them sconder the money?

[00:11:09] **WALTER:** That's right.

[00:11:13] **WILLIAM:** I think one point raised by the organization was that they felt that Tyree was in cahoots with you to [?outbid them on?] money. At one point in time, they said, Tyree, Jim Takisaki and Ben McAdoo stole \$80,000.

[00:11:33] **WALTER:** That's a bunch of crap. As I just told you, through the program, a lot of money was wasted, but nobody stole anything, cause we had the system set up so they couldn't. And particularly not those three. They didn't waste any of the money, and they didn't have the opportunity to steal any of it. I could name a lot of other guys who wasted dough that they shouldn't have. But stealing, no, if that had happened, I think, with the investigations and all that came around these programs later, we would have been on the rack, so that didn't happen.

[00:12:34] **WILLIAM:** Okay, let me back up a minute and clarify some other points. Back in 1964, '65, early '65, '66, '67, '68, was anybody else operating in this arena trying to get jobs for the construction workers, in that [?the Black House?] , [?Keith Brady?] and that group?

[00:13:02] **WALTER:** No. That's the period that I was telling you about that I was working with CAMP. Well, let me back up off it a little bit. Because in the early '60's, the mid-'60's, the CORE, Congress of Racial Equality, was picketing and demonstrating and sitting in, trying to get jobs for Blacks in the construction industry. We had real face-downs with the unions and the federal government and with the city and the county, to try and get jobs for guys, but actually getting the contractor—we didn't concentrate then on contractors getting contract jobs. That wasn't so much a concentration at that time, we were just trying to get the workers to work, the Black workers into places where they had been excluded before from work. So apart from that, nobody else was doing anything. And then later when I was with CAMP in '65, '66, we tried to organize them at that point, as I mentioned earlier, and that was the only effort going on at that time. And when that flopped, nobody else picked it up.

And then we picked it up again when I went to Model Cities, that was in about '67, and that effort took hold, although it had its ups and downs. I expected a lot of crap, but I knew that some of that money was going to go down the tube, but if in the long run you get two or three who really make it, I think it's worth it. And Willie Allen, who was one of the real rascals to start with, he's one that we really wasted a lot of money on, but you know, it appears that he's trying to run a sensible organization. I'm not that close to it anymore, I see him now and then. But, oh, we used to have terrific battles before, cause he was a real son of a bitch, Jesus Christ did he go out and mess the thing up. But now he seems to be acting more like a businessman. So maybe, things will turn around there.

[00:15:59] **WILLIAM:** Who do you think—would really be fair to say that Tyree Scott was the most stabling—had a very stabling effect on that organization in terms of its ability to survive and to maintain?

[00:16:12] **WALTER:** Yeah, I think so. I would say that. There were other guys who were stable, but they were not leaders, in fact they were afraid to be leaders. A lot of them really wanted to quit, but those guys had a little Mafia going too, and they made it. They made it so there were guys who were scared to quit, even. It's true! They would come to me and say, "Hey, I want to get out of this, how do I get out of this?" I said, "Well, get out!" "Well no, three of them came to see me and told me that I'd better not, or else." And sometimes the real rascals in there, the stable guy would get a good job and the old no-goodniks would call him up and say, "I hear you got a job, well I want to do the roofing." And the guy said, "Well, no I thought I 'd sublet that to so and so." They'd say, "No, I'm going to do it, or the job ain't going to get done." All that kind of crap. It was something else.

[00:17:34] **WILLIAM:** How do you identify that group—I identified a radical group that had an alliance with the [Black] Panther Party and then you had another group that allied with the Black House.

[00:17:44] **WALTER:** Well, these guys, they weren't aligned with an ideology, like the Panthers. They were just—

[00:17:54] **WILLIAM:** Opportunists?

[00:17:55] **WALTER:** Right. Just opportunists. That's about all you can sum it up as. And we, I think, were just very fortunate here to minimize the kind of stuff that they really wanted to pull. I gave all these examples of crap they'd do, but actually we were able to resist 90% of it, cause I don't know what would do, but I'd go out on the opening days, the first few days of one of these jobs where a guy thought he'd been threatened if he didn't do

what they wanted, and just be around there, and then nothing would happen. And if something had happened, I don't know what I would have done about it, cause I'd never carried guns, and I didn't have a gang of bodyguards around me or anything.

[00:19:11] **WILLIAM:** But they did?

[00:19:12] **WALTER:** They did. But even with their guns and, it didn't help them much. [?Hank Roney?] , who was one of the big rascals, had his bodyguard and a bunch of guns, and they still beat him up, after one of the meetings there one night.

[00:19:34] **WILLIAM:** [laughs] When I write it, I don't think people will believe it. [laughs]

[00:19:39] **WALTER:** [laughs] Well, it's true. But guys like Willie Allen, J. P. Francis, guys like that, they stuck with the organization, but they kept quiet, they didn't want to be leaders, just kind of stayed in the background. And I think that helped them to survive too, because if all those guys had left it altogether, it would have died right on the vine.

[00:20:19] **WILLIAM:** Another point I want to raise, in terms of ideology, and I think that was a key factor also in the organization in the early days when it was getting started, is they had a fairly broad set of goals and objectives, that included a whole lot of social issues beyond their self-interests, and beyond just that of trying to get contracts, bonding, and some of the other germane interests they had. They were trying to get jobs also, the organization was split between trying to get jobs for workers and trying to get contracts for contractors. Now, what role did that play in the fragmentation of the organization?

[00:21:08] **WALTER:** Well, it's my feeling that it really didn't play that much. I think that a lot of that business about jobs for workers was more rhetoric than reality. The concentration of almost all of those guys, and even Tyree when he was leading it, was to get construction jobs for the contractors. And now they pledged themselves to try to hire Blacks, to the greatest extent possible, on their workforce, but they weren't really spending much time then going out trying to get construction jobs for workers. And after Tyree was forced out of that organization, then he concentrated on the workers' aspect. But there wasn't that much of it from the inside. Those guys were all too hungry and too hurting themselves.

[00:22:18] **WILLIAM:** To be concerned with the worker?

[00:22:20] **WALTER:** Yes, at that point.

[00:22:22] **WILLIAM:** But how did the lawsuit—They initiated the lawsuit against the unions, [Ironworkers] Local 86, and the Justice Department came in later and filed a court action on these things also.

[00:22:36] **WALTER:** Well, that wasn't them, really. That was after the break with Tyree.

[00:22:51] **WILLIAM:** No, that was before, the CCA was a party to that suit.

[00:22:55] **WALTER:** Well, they may have been, but because I testified in that case. [pauses] Oh, I know now. That—Well, you remember when I said the first year of the Model Cities was a planning year, the money really didn't start to flow? But we started off organizing these guys early in that planning year..

[00:23:28] **WILLIAM:** Early in '69?

[00:23:29] **WALTER:** No, I thought it was earlier than that.

[00:23:36] **WILLIAM:** ‘68?

[00:23:36] **WALTER:** Yeah, at least.

[00:23:38] **WILLIAM:** Well, the first meeting was held sometime in May of ‘69, I got the minutes, I’ve got a copy of that. It was May of ‘69.

[00:23:46] **WALTER:** That was the first meeting?

[00:23:49] **WILLIAM:** The meeting that they—I think a letter went out to all the contractors to meet somewhere, I think it was the First A.M.E. Church.

[00:23:57] **WALTER:** Was it? Okay, I'm bad on dates, because I thought that—Well, sure, you said that was the first letter, the first meeting?

[00:24:12] **WILLIAM:** I'm pretty sure it was the first meeting.

[00:24:14] **WALTER:** Because the problem that occurred was, since we got them organized, and they were ready to go, “Okay, where’s the money? Let’s do our thing.” But the federal money wasn't rolling in, because we were still in that planning year. And even after we finished our plans, and sent it to the feds and accepted it, Johnson—well, Johnson was leaving office and Nixon was coming in, and Nixon even held it up some more. They were [?hot to trot?] , and we couldn't deliver. So that's when they got into marching in the streets and closing down jobs and all that stuff. They were organized and they were ready to go, but we couldn't really funnel the dough to them to get them going, so they went out on their own and started pressuring the industry to let them in.

[00:25:24] **WILLIAM:** It would seem to me that if the money would have been funneled into the organization, they would never have pursued that course of action.

[00:25:35] **WALTER:** That’s right. [pauses] Tyree was still leading it then, and that's when they really got kind of famous.

[00:25:55] **WILLIAM:** They really made a significant contribution to the whole country. It’s really surprising, a lot of people don't realize what kind of effect these people had in terms of the nature of the construction industry, not only here but nationally.

[00:26:09] **WALTER:** Right. Those tactics that they started got picked up by a lot of other cities, and they started doing the same thing in other cities. Well, you know, it's interesting you do all that stuff and then you forget, and I'd forgotten that little interlude there and what got them going on it in the first place. And you're absolutely right, if that money had been available, right then—

[00:26:41] **WILLIAM:** They would approach it from purely an administrative perspective.

[00:26:46] **WALTER:** Right.

[00:26:47] **WILLIAM:** As opposed to an active perspective.

[00:26:48] **WALTER:** Right.

[00:26:52] **WILLIAM:** I think you answered my question, you filled in the holes that I needed.